FWIS 127 HOW POEMS WORK SPRING 2014

Poems are made out of vowels and consonants, nouns and verbs, words and phrases, sentences and lines, sounds and images. They are not made of ideas or universal truths; they do not mean just anything you want it to. Since nothing in the world means just anything you want it to, why should poems?

They are also made according to conventions—a sonnet is fourteen lines—and out of a tradition. Poets have read many, many other poems in order to understand how poems work, in order to make their own poems work as well. And we will come to understand individual poems by reading each one in the context of the others we have read in order to see how the order of vowels and consonants, lines and sentences, images and sounds make each one a *different experience .* Not a puzzle or a message, but an experience first.

Our text books will be Joel Connaroe's anthology *Six American Poets* (Vintage, 1993: ISBN 0 679 74525 4) and Robert Pinsky's *The Sounds of Poetry* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux: 1998: ISBN 0 374 26695 6). Both are available at Amazon at bargain prices.

There is no set syllabus to begin with; we'll start by reading a few poems for every class in whatever order seems appropriate. To prepare for class, you have to read each poem several times, and some of those times you have to read them out loud. Every class will begin with one or two of you reading the day's poems to the class

We will begin by writing a number of short papers, then some that grow longer and more comprehensive. Each of you has to keep a journal at the rate of one page per class—three pages a week—and each of you will make at least two oral presentations. There'll be more writing than reading, and all of these exercises will be graded.

Our mantra is: " We are not studying poetry, we are reading poems!"